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ABSTRACT

The conference described in this report was designed to explore fundamentally important aspects of educating 3- through 13-year-old children in a variety of school settings. A total of 250 participants, representing 17 states, attended. This volume provides the text of a conference paper by Melvin D. Levine, M.D., entitled "The Challenge of Developmentary Education: Preserving Natural Diversity." Sections of the discussion focus on individual differences in young children's memory, selection and registration, storage, consolidation of material, active working memory, automatization of basic subskills, retrieval, and interferences with children's memory. Concluding remarks identify 10 societal issues to consider in thinking about possible reorientations of the elementary school. Also included are a few comments made at the conference by Dr. Ruth Love, the keynote speaker, and by workshop discussants, as well as a list of participants and three collaboratively written verses about education. (RH)

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An Account of the First Annual Conference

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WHAT IS THE **esc** ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CENTER?

The Elementary School Center (ESC) is an organization which brings together professionals and others involved in the development and education of the child in the elementary school (pre-school through eighth grade). It is like no other association in the country. It is an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt organization.

The objectives of ESC are:

- To improve the quality of schooling
- To serve as a national advocate for elementary schools
- To encourage, implement, and disseminate studies and research about elementary schools
- To increase public awareness of the importance of schools serving children from three to thirteen years old
- To provide a resource center for those involved with elementary schools
- To sharpen awareness of issues affecting elementary education
- To encourage communication and cooperative efforts among different groups working with children and youth of elementary school age
- To expand its activities through participation of its members
- To describe elementary school practices which can strengthen education at all levels

WHY AN **esc** ?

Recognizing that after the family, the elementary school provides the most significant institutional experience in a child's life, a group of elementary educators and other professionals established the ESC to serve the following needs:

1. the need for greater understanding by the public and the educational world of the power and complexity of the effects of elementary schooling in children's lives
2. the need to view schools as a continuum in which each element must be defined by reference to the others, rather than as a hierarchy in which the latest stage is the most significant.
3. the need to increase regard for elementary educators and other professionals working with the children.
4. the need to attract newcomers to elementary teaching at a time when the number of young children is increasing and teaching staffs are shrinking.

SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN: Multiple
Perspectives on Meeting the Needs of the
Elementary School Child

1st Annual Conference, January 24th, 1986

An Account



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contribution from the Town School, NYC.*

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The calligraphy was executed by Jennifer Schonbrunn, a student at Weston High School, Weston, CT.

The exhibit of children's art was coordinated by Robert Blandford, Associate Director of the Children's Museum of Manhattan. He was assisted by Dalila Rubinstein, Kathleen Schneider, and Sally Rodi.

The luncheon centerpieces were made by the second graders at the Rippowam-Cisqua School, Bedford, NY.

Finally, it is important to note the support of the Board of Fellows and particularly the work of the Elementary School Center Program Committee. Under the inspired leadership of Gordon Klopf, the following Fellows conceptualized and planned the details for this First Annual Conference on "The Child As Learner in the Elementary School": Anna Jones, Waldo Jones, Mary Newmann, Linda Sanger, Allan Shedlin, Jr., and Justine Winters. The Conference details and administration were coordinated by Allan Shedlin, Jr., ESC Executive Director.

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**As of January, 1986

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation.

PREFACE

The first annual Elementary School Center conference exemplified everything for which the Center is now known: a focus on children, an appreciation for elementary educators and the special issues they face, a thoughtfully-organized, on-schedule program and an interdisciplinary gathering which is rarely duplicated elsewhere.

The conference, held at the New York Society for Ethical Culture, on January 24th, 1986, was designed to explore critical aspects of educating 3-13 year old children in a variety of school settings. The 250 participants came from seventeen states to hear former Chicago School Superintendent Ruth Love open the conference. Currently a TV news commentator, she inspired the audience with her superb speaking ability and impassioned message about the needs of elementary children and educators in the 20th and 21st century. She was followed by Melvin Levine, M.D., a professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina who presented a combination of theory and example culled from his research. He urged educators to celebrate the diversity among children, and recognize their cultural and ethnic differences which Ruth Love mentioned, and the variation of individual children's cognitive strengths and learning styles, so necessary to the adult world, but so unappreciated in childhood.

Over lunch, amidst an exhibit of children's art from the Children's Museum of Manhattan, the participants heard Allan Shedlin, Jr., Executive Director of the Elementary School Center, comment on his experience as a member of Secretary Bennett's Elementary Education Study Group. Then Alan Ziegler of Teachers and Writers Collaborative, writer-in-residence at P.S. 75, read poetry written by children he has taught. That poetry is interspersed throughout this account.

The afternoon included four simultaneous workshops given by Jeanne Chall, David Perkins, both of Harvard University, Bickley Simpson, educational psychologist, and Priscilla Vail, a learning specialist and teacher at Rippowam-Cisqua School. Each workshop addressed learning from a different viewpoint.

In closing, Gordon Klopf, Dean Emeritus of the Bank Street College of Education and Vice President of the Elementary School Center, urged the group to step forth as elementary school educators and continue the interdisciplinary dialogue begun at this conference. Parents, teachers, administrators, community, health professionals, and guidance personnel must share their own "multiple perspectives" on childhood. And he reminded the group of a major theme of the day: It is essential to remember that children have multiple perspectives, too.

While it would have been appropriate in this account of the conference to provide a full text of all the speakers and workshops, technical difficulties interfered. So the decision was made to select interesting quotes, and to present only Dr. Levine's paper in full.

As memories of the 1986 conference are revived by this volume, it is time to plan ahead to the Second Annual Conference, "The Culture of the Elementary School," to be held on Friday, January 23, 1987, at the Elementary School Center. Terrence E. Deal of Vanderbilt University will be the keynote speaker.

Kathe Jervis, Editor

MORNING PROGRAM

- | | | |
|-------|--|--|
| 8 30 | Registration
Juice, coffee, tea & Danish
Exhibit of Children's Art | |
| 9 00 | General Session
Welcoming Remarks | Walter W. Birge, III
President, ESC Board of Fellows
Headmaster, Fenn School,
Concord, MA |
| 9 15 | Introduction of
Ruth Love, Ph.D.

"Elementary Education: its
Significance for the 20th &
21st Centuries" | Mary Newmann
Treasurer, ESC Board of Fellows
Director, Churchill School & Center
for Learning Disabilities, NYC

Ruth Love
President, Ruth Love Enterprises
Commentator, ABC TV, News,
Chicago
Former Supt. of Schools, Chicago
and Oakland, CA |
| 10 15 | Questions & Answers | |
| 10 30 | Break | |
| 10 45 | Introduction of
Melvin D. Levine, M.D.

"The Challenge of
Developmentary
Education: The Perversity
of Diversity Amid the
Enormity of Conformity" | Kingsley Ervin
Secretary, ESC Board of Fellows
Headmaster, Grace Church School,
NYC

Melvin D. Levine
Professor of Pediatrics
Director, The Clinical Center for the
Study of Development & Learning,
The University of North Carolina,
Chapel Hill |
| 12 00 | Questions & Answers | |
| 12 30 | Luncheon Program
Introduction of
Allan Shedlin Jr., M.A.

"Washington Update:
Education Secretary
Bennett's Elementary
Education Study Group"

Introduction of
Alan Ziegler

Program of Readings | Norman Charles Wakely
ESC Board of Fellows
Headmaster, Cardigan Mountain
School, Canaan, NH
Allan Shedlin Jr.
Executive Director, ESC
Member, U.S. Education Secretary
Bennett's Elementary Education
Study Group

Marvin I. Gottlieb, M.D.
ESC Board of Fellows
Director, Institute of Child
Development, Hackensack, NJ
Professor of Pediatrics, New Jersey
Medical School, Newark, NJ

Alan Ziegler
Writer-in-Residence, PS 75, Man.
Poet & Fiction Writer
Author, The Writing Workshop, vol. I
& II (for teachers)
Arts Advisory Committee, Council of
Chief State School Officers. |

AFTERNOON PROGRAM

2:00 Concurrent Workshops

- #1 "Reading, Writing, & Thinking: How They Develop & Interrelate"
- Jeanne S. Chall, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Director, Reading Laboratory, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Introduction by Justine Winters
ESC Board of Fellows
Principal, Amenia & Millerton Schools, Amenia, NY

- #2 "Brain Development & Learning Styles with implications for the computer in the classroom"
- Bickley Simpson, Ed.D.
Educational Psychologist, Milton, MA

Introduction by Jules Spotts, Ph.D.
ESC Board of Fellows
Clinical Psychologist
Consultant, New Canaan Country School, New Canaan, CT

- #3 "Creativity-The Core of Learning"
- David N. Perkins, Ph.D.
Co-Director, Project Zero, Harvard University

Introduction by Anna M. Jones
ESC Board of Fellows
Director, Charles River School Dover, MA

- #4 "Finding the Fingerprint: Helping Teachers & Administrators Identify Learning Styles"
- Priscilla Vail, M.A.T.
Learning Specialist & Teacher, Rippowam-Cisqua School, Bedford, NY, Author

Introduction by Waldo Jones
ESC Board of Fellows
Head of Lower School, Rippowam-Cisqua School Bedford, NY

3:45 Conclusion

"Tapestry of the Day: Patterns for the 1990's- Implications of the Day's Presentations"
- Gordon J. Klopff, Ph.D.
Vice President, ESC Board of Fellows
Dean, Bank St. College of Education, Educational Consultant

Introduction by Cary E. Bell, Ed.D.
ESC Board of Fellows
Principal, Shoreham-Wading River Middle School District Shoreham, NY

- 4:15 Exhibit of Children's Art
Social Hour
(wine & cheese)

Invitation by Linda Sanger
ESC Board of Fellows

THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPMENTARY EDUCATION: PRESERVING NATURAL DIVERSITY*

by Melvin D. Levine, M.D.

Dr. Mel Levine was born in New York, and first schooled at the Kensington Elementary School in Great Neck. He went on to Brown University where he was Junior Phi Beta Kappa and graduated Summa Cum Laude. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Marlin College, took his medical training at Harvard, and after a stint in the Air Force, has done most of his work as a physician and teacher near Boston. He was, until recently, director of the Outpatient Clinic at Children's Hospital and an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the Harvard Medical School. He is currently Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Levine's bibliography lists over eighty publications. Two illustrative examples are a paper called the "Unhappy Wanderers" about children with attention deficits, and "Developmental Double Jeopardy," a study of clumsiness and self esteem in learning disabled children.

He is a chairperson of the Advisory Council of the Elementary School Center.

* Kathe Jervis edited this paper.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPMENTARY EDUCATION: PRESERVING NATURAL DIVERSITY

Elementary school was far from my finest hour. I was a child who usually did his homework but lost it on the way to school. I had a perpetually runny nose. My only real friends had four legs and used to follow me to school. I was perennially chosen last for every athletic event; there were intense battles over who would have to have Levine today. My fifth grade teacher wanted to retain me because "how can he go on to sixth grade, he can never find his pencil."

Against this backdrop and with those vivid memories, reconstructed in some Proustian way, I found myself a pediatrician running an outpatient department, facing not traditional childhood diseases, but large numbers of elementary school students who had no disease, but who in some way seemed to be chronically deprived of success. I began to realize that the traditional disease model did not fit these children. The more children I saw, the more I wondered about something called "normalcy;" the difference between variation and deviation became more obscure. It became difficult to know whether the children were suffering because something was wrong with the children or because of some colossal misunderstanding about childhood.

When we see children who are struggling inordinately in elementary school, it brings to mind a disparity between childhood and adulthood. It is much easier to be an adult than a child. An adult is permitted to practice a specialty, to pursue strengths, to pare away those areas of deficiency that can lead to so much inhuman embarrassment. We do not afford this particular right to children. We set up a system whereby children are expected to be good at everything and weaknesses are labeled problems.

We are constantly asking children to do what no adult would ever be expected to do, and we have to ask what toll that exacts. Why are there no eccentric children? We like eccentric adults, but the term doesn't exist for childhood. We try to change an eccentric child and worry about an odd kid. It may be that this loss of eccentricity in childhood is a very serious omen.

Rather than cultivating eccentricity, children, especially at an elementary age, have one primary agenda as they leave the comfort of home each morning and head for school: the avoidance of humiliation. At all costs they must look good and save face with their peer group.

Children must do this with a deprivation of privacy that we do not impose on adults. An adult who can't dance need not go to dances, but if a child can't dance, there is a good chance that she'll be put on display and mocked by her peer group. If a child is ashamed of something on his body that he would rather conceal, he may not be permitted, but an adult has that option. So we have set up a very odd circumstance for children based on some notion of uniformity that may in fact create diseases we see every day in schools and clinics.

As a medical student and intern, I encountered two formative revelations about variation and deviation in children. I began to realize that when parents bring a baby home from the nursery, there is an amazing amount of individuality already wired in before these babies have even seen the inside of their homes or had any real parenting. I also realized that children did not develop as uniformly as the series of milestones listed in the pediatric textbook implied, and that the notion of latency occurring in elementary school assumed a period of stagnation. These assumptions about uniformity and latency showed up in terms like "minimal brain damage" and "hyperactivity," and labels like "dyslexia" and "learning disability" became overused because it is difficult to distinguish between variation and deviation. We must recognize that even from day one there is considerable variation and diversity among children. The very diversity which allows for collaboration and teamwork to accomplish extraordinary human feats in the adult world is not valued during childhood.

VARIATIONS IN MEMORY

I would like to discuss one source of variation among children: memory. Whether we like it or not, schools put an enormous stress on remembering. We are seeing almost an epidemic of children who are bright, destined for outstanding futures, and have many potential roles to play in our society. But they are struggling with this function called memory.

At every level of memory, variation exists among children sitting in a classroom. This variation is not necessarily pathological, but is a continuum present in any population.

Selection and Registration

At the selection and registration levels, there is a fascinating relationship between concentration and memory. We hear from parents of children who have problems in this area that their child has the best memory of anyone they know. So they can't understand why she is doing so poorly in school. She is the only one who can remember what color tie Uncle George wore four years ago at Christmas, or can remember the hotel room number on that Florida vacation taken six years ago. Yet she can't take a phone message or remember certain salient information at school. The issue of selectivity, what one commits to memory, becomes critical and we find that different children have different patterns of what they select to remember.

To be selective, a child must be alert and fully aroused and equally bright children vary enormously in alertness and arousal. We find that some youngsters have to struggle to stay awake in academic settings. Other children focus better at certain times. Adults can choose to work at night, but we don't have night schools for children.

One fourteen year old boy told me that as soon as he has been sitting in class for a few minutes he feels as if he didn't get enough sleep the night before. "Then I get up and walk to my next class and in the corridor, I feel wide awake again. Then I sit down in class and I feel tired. As long as I keep walking around I feel awake." It takes a certain level of physical activity to keep him aroused.

These youngsters sometimes find they can concentrate better if they have something in their hands. So they bring a toy to school and are told that they can't possibly concentrate while playing with a car or a toy airplane. What the child can't articulate, but would like to, is that he can only concentrate when he is physically active. As an adult it is legitimate to take notes that will never be read; it strengthens attention. Knitting during a lecture helps a person to listen. But children are denied this strategy which might strengthen their attention.

Some children are troubled by inconsistent arousal and focus. If a child has quiz scores ranging from 92 to 42, it is often interpreted as moral turpitude. Many children with performance inconsistency have a hard time in life because they keep getting caught doing something right and getting into trouble for it. "You should have seen him last Thursday. He sat down and did ten problems with no trouble. We know he can do it. He just has to apply himself." Very often the best advice for a child like that is to be careful not to give exemplary performances. It is far more acceptable to be consistently incompetent than to be occasionally a star. Most children would rather be successful and perform consistently well if they had the chance, so we need to think about the misunderstanding and its moral consequences for children.

Storage

Some children store material differently and have preferred modalities through which to process information. When the teacher gives a sequence of verbal instructions, "I'd like you all to take out your books and open them to page 14 and copy down these new words, then turn the page and answer the questions, close your book, put down the pencil and sit up straight so I'll know you are finished." A child who cannot process that size chunk of sequential verbal instructions will hear something about a pencil, but he doesn't process such instructions on how to solve that math problem. In some children these modality preferences are inconsequential because other modalities work well for them, but in certain students it is a question whether this pattern represents disability or a distinct cognitive style, one that might be quite acceptable in the adult world.

Mike is such an example. Mike is a thirteen year old boy who was brought to our clinic. His two older brothers were both incarcerated. His parents were working class people. His father was in the construction business in a factory town. Mike was frequently truant and was refusing to go to school. He had a long history of academic difficulties, especially reading. We evaluated Mike and found he had significant language disabilities. He had trouble understanding or producing syntax, dealing with subordinate clauses, and lacked a sense of phonology which prevented good word analysis. His verbal memory was notably weak. But on our developmental test he was able to copy geometric forms which looked better than

the originals. He was also extraordinary on visual processing tests that involved no motor output. I couldn't keep up with his performance on three dimensional puzzles. He was amazing. His father related to me how when he took Mike out to construction jobs, Mike was able quickly, in moments even, to trouble shoot problems with machines, even though he sometimes had difficulty articulating what was wrong.

Mike was pretty well wiped out at thirteen. He was severely depressed, apprehensive and increasingly isolated. We were able to get Mike into a special school for learning disorders, but he was kicked out by the end of September. He said, "That school's for retards. I'm not going there." We got Mike a tutor at home, but he wasn't very responsive. Throughout all this, Mike kept saying, "Why can't I go to 'Voc' School where I can do the things I like?" People kept explaining that you can go to vocational school in ninth grade if you get good grades. Mike knew, and he was probably more right than any of us, that with his low reading skills, the likelihood of his reading well enough to get into vocational school was minimal. My last encounter with Mike was when I went to visit him in a mental hospital.

There is a real question whether Mike will function in a meaningful way in society. Mike looms in my mind as an enormous challenge for our society. The adult world has loads of room for Mike. He can be richer than any of us. He can play a major role in building skyscrapers and developments. But how do we get Mike to seventeen? If there was ever a challenge for elementary school, it is Mike. Mike is only the tip of the iceberg; many Mikes are suffering because we don't know how to accommodate specialized brains early in life.

Consolidation

Children's ability to consolidate material after it enters memory varies enormously and is often subject specific. A child can have no trouble consolidating a foreign language because she can figure out where in memory to put French verbs, but the same child can't consolidate mathematical principles. With probing it is possible to detect (a better word than diagnose) what subjects are easily consolidated by a particular child. I have yet to find a child who can consolidate nothing.

Perhaps the miraculous variation in the ability to consolidate is really a source of our human individuality.

As normal children develop, they do not increase their memory storage capacity, rather they use strategies to get information in and out more effectively. They become good at metamemory, the ability to step outside and study their own memory. By junior high school, kids can tell you, "I remember much better if I study right before I go to sleep at night." Recent studies show that kids who are doing very well in school are good at metamemory and find ways to simplify learning. Students who need to simplify the most, often resist strategies. We need to make those children more consciously active about their learning by asking them to come up with a memory plan. How are they going to decide what to memorize? How are they going to predict what might be on the test? How could they test themselves to see what they know? For these children, learning needs to be a much more conscious act.

One famous study (Benjamin Snyder, *The Hidden Curriculum*, MIT, 1970) has shown that students who do very well academically have an almost uncanny ability to read expectations. They can figure out that one teacher wants an unusual or strange essay, but another teacher wants the information straight. These master strategists can discern what is demanded of them which is an incredibly adaptive skill. It is handicapping not to have it.

Active Working Memory

Different children have different degrees of active working memory. Active memory is what you use when you get to your closet and remember that you are there to find your shoes. I knew a little girl in Boston who did badly in math class, even though she understood math concepts, knew her facts and had a good command of algorithms. I said to her, "What happens when you do math?" She had only one phrase: "Scrambled eggs. It all gets jumbled up." She couldn't retain in active memory what she was doing while she was doing it. Some children are slow to put together active working memory even though ultimately they will have it. Active working memory is task specific. Some material during certain tasks just keeps falling apart. Scrambled eggs.

If you stop a child with poor active working memory in the middle of a paragraph to ask her what it is about and she can't tell you because she can't hold the plot, the main idea, and the supporting details together long enough or effectively enough to understand, this is a problem with memory, not comprehension. Elementary teachers need to be aware of this difference.

Automatization

Writing is anathema for certain children, and demands to prove competency on paper increase exponentially as children approach late elementary and junior high school. Some children have excellent ideas and language, but they write so slowly that they lose the ideas and the language. If the motor aspect is not automatic by sixth or seventh grade, children can lose their sophisticated ideas in writing. Their work is often illegible. Illegibility doesn't seem to be a fine motor problem, but a motor memory deficit: The plans for letter formations are not retrieved automatically enough to flow through the pencil. Basic subskills of writing are not sufficiently automatic to allow that child to think and write at the same time. A child will say, "Every time I write, I lose my memory. I can't remember how to spell when I write." Eventually, a child who is slow to automatize may gain that ability, but maybe not until ninth grade. What are we going to do with this otherwise competent kid? Maladaptation and loss of incentives often cloud the issue, but what is so bad about being slow to automatize? Time is not the point in most adult projects, but in elementary school we make lack of speed a serious problem.

Retrieval

As a child gets older, he must pull information out of multiple memory banks all at the same time and at the same rate. If you remember the spelling after the punctuation, forget it — that puts an amazing demand on the human nervous system. Though some children can retrieve entire configurations quickly and on demand, others do much better if they are allowed

to retrieve information in their own way. These kids do poorly on college boards, even though they do well in high school. They also do poorly in schools which give multiple choice tests all the time. These students can be fantastic in discussion because they can choose what they are going to remember, but they can't take tests because they don't recognize the one correct answer. They do better writing term papers than taking tests, and often had a history of trouble with multiplication tables and foreign language, but are very creative. One father put it very nicely when he said, "My kid is an expert on prehistoric animals. When he selects the dinosaur and the information, he could snow you at a cocktail party." But this child's memory doesn't work when asked to give specific details on demand.

A recent study of junior high school math students in England showed that some children did math purely on memory. When they faced a math problem, they would say, "Let me see, how did the teacher show us how to do that?" They tried to remember having seen it done. Other students totally disregarded memory and said, "Let me figure out how to do this."

Both those groups did adequately in math, but the honor students were using both methods. They would say, "Let me remember how the teacher did it." But then they would ask themselves, "Does this look right? Does this make sense?" They were using memory to check cognition and cognition to check memory.

INTERFERENCES WITH MEMORY

What can interfere with memory? Cultural comfort, for one. Alien stimuli are harder to store. A major challenge in elementary school is how to deal with children who experience dissonance between home and school. When values at home are different, school doesn't have the potency to be presenting a durable set of stimuli. There is no question that emotions affect memory, and anxiety is probably the worst enemy of attention and memory, as is depression, but we can't say this is an information processing problem or a depression. We have to get away from either/or formulations about children. Children obviously differ in their insulation and their ability to resist stress and we have to work that variable into our system.

"Effort disabilities" interfere with arousal and attention enough so that children may vary more in their ability to work than in their ability to learn. For some children paying attention is hard work in itself and effort requires more effort for these children than for others. The effort may be so great it isn't worth it, and the child is labeled unmotivated. We have to be careful to maintain accountability without allowing a moral issue to develop.

Children would like to have what I call, "somatic equanimity," but they have to take a body to school with them every day. A thirteen year old girl wakes up and looks in the mirror and sees a pimple on her nose. For the rest of the day she becomes that pimple. She walks through the halls convinced that everyone is staring at her nose and teachers are discussing her lesion in the faculty lounge. She sits in English class with her hand over her nose for the entire morning.

Years ago I became interested in encopresis, which is a serious, annoying, debilitating, chronic bowel disorder. Children who have it seem to lose control of their bowels and then become so constipated they lose their bowel tone. All the muscles in the bowels stop working and the bowels begin to leak. Children lose their most primitive form of control and live in constant fear other kids will find out. This problem is sometimes a reaction to school bathrooms. They don't want to defecate at school and by the time they get home they don't have to any more. I was called in by a school system once to help with an epidemic of encopresis. We rapidly found out that to stem widespread toilet tissue abuse, the principal removed all the toilet tissue from the bathroom and children were required to raise their hands in class before the teacher would dole out an appropriate amount of toilet tissue. The result was stool retention in an entire elementary school population. Taking your body to school with you is a heavy burden.

The contemporary cultural reality is a further variable in learning. While it's fashionable to put television at the top of the list of interferences, compelling research does show television's negative impact on cognition. A fascinating study in Canada (cited in "Children's Television: Its Effect on Nutrition and Cognitive Development," *Pediatric Annals*, Vol. 14, 1985, p. 793) compared demographically well-matched children from different rural towns which did or did not have television.

Reading scores were considerably lower in towns with television, but even more dramatic were the findings about children's abilities to write and speak and draw inferences. With television the size of the chunk is small, the demand for sustained attention is minimal, and the stress is on redundancy. The stimuli don't require inferential reasoning.

The music children listen to has the same characteristics as television: the size of the chunk is small, the redundancy is great, the thematic length is brief and repetitive. How can school compete with this rapid availability of stimuli requiring little effort and no attention? If you tune out, it doesn't matter because you'll hear it again momentarily. How can Charles Dickens compete with this pre-packaged intellectual super-market fare?

The challenge of a multicultural society is another reality. How can we accommodate to cultural diversity without trying to change it, especially when we integrate the developmental variations as well? One of the great learnings in kindergarten is that not everybody has an Aunt Gladys just because I do and not everybody has an upstairs bathroom just because I do. It is a serious challenge to help children reaffirm their own values while recognizing the range of values in the community.

Middle class children have their own issues. They have Kung Fu on Monday, saxophone on Tuesday, modern dance on Wednesday, soccer on Thursday, in all of which they must comply with adult expectations. We ask children to follow rules which do not require encoding or initiative, so how can these children create on their own? They become team players, do what the coach tells them, and go along with the crowd. When children's capacity to produce rich narratives in junior high school seems to be directly proportional to the time they spent in imaginary play during elementary school, maybe we need to say to kids, "No sports this afternoon. No stamp club. Just go off and reenact whatever you want to reenact." We needn't eliminate all lessons, but we have to wonder whether we have gone overboard in not allowing children more time to be their own producers and directors.

If we think our educational system promotes conformity, it doesn't hold a candle to how children promote conformity among each other. Peer tyranny engenders a serious weirdness phobia which may discourage eccentric children. If you

are not supposed to tie your shoelaces, then you better not tie your shoelaces. The best way for children to protect themselves is to mimic their peers. They can't talk about you if you act like them, talk like them and look like them.

We are seeing extreme conformity everywhere. I see it in medical school applications and in potential Rhodes Scholars. People play it safe, accumulate orthodox credentials and interests, simply out of a desire not to appear weird. This lack of risk-taking may start early in childhood. We need to find ways to encourage students to celebrate weirdness and to value differences.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

The elementary school has assumed enormous responsibility. I don't think the Elementary School Center is implying that anything is wrong with the institution as it now exists, but we have to look more deeply at societal issues which present themselves and think about possible reorientations. As a pediatrician these are some issues that concern me.

1) We need to overcome the preoccupation with preparing children. What is it exactly that we are preparing them for? If the focus is on preparing children then we have to be incredibly responsive to technological change. We may not need to teach spelling anymore because there is spelling software. Maybe we should give up preparing children for anything and think of elementary school as an end in itself, a very positive life experience that takes place right here and now. Maybe elementary school should be one of life's moments of attainment and satisfaction which gives children the experience of mastery in a very nonspecific sense. Elementary school should be opening up options, creating self-knowledge, and promoting autonomy and initiative.

2) We need to wonder about what happens when a specialized brain is constrained to practice a specialty for which it was not wired. We need to wonder what are the long term consequences of undiscovered, underutilized or thwarted talents in elementary school. We need to wonder what is implied when we say to a child, "You can do better," when the statement is incorrect.

3) We need to wonder what are the results of over exposure

to too much failure too early in life. Or too much success. I often give out case studies at workshops and one that elicits exceptional interest is Thomas. Thomas is eleven, a good athlete, a good student, a good pianist who is also good looking and popular. Teachers take Thomas climbing on weekends because he is the most fun, instead of the fat kid who's not very attractive. Might it not be the fifth grade scholar/athletes who are the most vulnerable to crises later because they never learn how to cope? Thomas is a real boy who got into drugs in high school after his parents got divorced. He had no ability to cope. Fifth grade was his finest hour.

4) Iatrogenic is a medical word for diseases doctors cause. Maybe teachers cause some too, and if so, we ought to begin to enumerate what they are. One might be the consequences of retention. A study has found forty year old people who still wake up with nightmares about being retained in the third grade. If retention is such a major blow to self esteem that its effects can last thirty-five years, we need to think seriously before we do it, no matter what the economic constraints.

5) We need to see that elementary schools acknowledge diversity. School should celebrate differences and work to overcome any weirdness phobia among children and adults. One possibility is to stress early pursuit of depth. I might even suggest that first and second graders have an opportunity to major in something. We could have saved Mike that way. I fret over nonverbal kids who have otherwise excellent cognitive skills but no chance to exercise them early in life. Maybe these children need to specialize a little earlier, and even be graded more seriously in their specialty.

6) We need to bridge the gap between current research on child development and teaching. Those of us doing research on children have an enormous amount to learn from the people who are on the front lines. At the same time, what we're learning about children has implications for education. Let me give one profound example.

Recent research about adolescent suicide in New York City showed that many teenagers did not commit suicide because they were depressed or chronically anxious, but rather they became involved in a crisis they couldn't handle. They were caught with drugs in their locker or they flunked a course. The suicides occurred almost uniformly between the time the kids

got into trouble and the time parents were called, that is, when the consequences were uncertain. It was almost unheard of for a child to commit suicide after parents were told, no matter how badly they reacted. This finding has tremendous implications for school administrators. When a kid is in trouble, move quickly. Don't say, "I'm going to call your parents next week," because the children's fantasies are horrendous.

7) We need to teach children more child development. They should learn how memory develops so they can watch it happen and exercise more control. Children can benefit from learning about language development so we can say to them, "When you were younger you couldn't deal with complex clauses and now you can — and your kid brother can't."

8) In order to understand diversity better, children need to collaborate more. Skyscrapers are built in New York City by people with individual strengths and weaknesses, not by a single person. How about allowing children to take tests together in teams after they have studied together? They will have to decide who is better at numbers, who is good at remembering pictures, and who will draw the best illustration. The best teams will have the most differences.

We teach collaboration very well on the athletic field, but intellectual collaboration needs to be taught in elementary school as a way of fostering tolerance. Collaboration which exploits the special skills of a particular child should be the model. For instance, one school had an unattractive, unathletic thirteen year old who was not doing well academically, but he was a computer freak. The school allowed him to become the statistician for the football team. He developed the software and kids needed him all the time to get their latest stats. He became the most popular person around.

9) We need to actively campaign against eligibility criteria — those absurd notions that only kids with a discrepancy between I.Q. and achievement need special help. If a child is struggling with school we have to help. Otherwise, it is like seeing someone drown and saying you can't rescue him until he has a swimming test. Problems with attention, organization, and writing, especially in late elementary school are not going to be picked up by eligibility requirements. Such a policy does work. Special education laws without eligibility criteria in Massachusetts have not been as expensive as people feared.

10) We need to offer earlier and more universal vocational education. Then even Mel Levine with his good linguistic skills would have had to fix an engine or figure out what was wrong with a car. The study of practical life skills, rather than stigmatizing certain losers in society, ought to be required for everyone in this technological age. Besides benefitting the nonmechanics, many kids without good linguistic skills would have a chance to shine in those settings. Let me give an emblematic example.

A banquet celebrating the tenth anniversary of Massachusetts' Special Education Law took place in a vocational school, and the head of the school took me on a tour. We went to the electricity department, and the plumbing department and computer science. I was jealous; I could have used that education. Then we went down to the auto body department and the teacher happened to be there. "How's Sam doing?" the head asked. "Great" was the answer. "Who's Sam?" I asked.

"Sam was incorrigible, the worst kid we ever had. He wasn't learning anything and was so disruptive. He was a commercial art student and the teacher wanted him out immediately. I realized we had an opening in auto body so I gave him one last chance. The first day the teacher in auto body said, 'Sam, I'm going to tell you what to do in this class and I'm not giving you any choice. You are going to paint vans.' Sam asked why and the answer was 'because no one has ever done that before'. Sam began to paint people's vans. Within two months kids started to consult Sam about van painting. Sam had never been asked by anybody about anything before in his entire life. He became an expert on van painting. The teacher said he knew when he first saw Sam that if Sam did anything anyone else did, he would do it second best. The teacher invented a subspecialty for Sam in order for Sam to be the best."

When I asked this school head, "What percentage of your students go into the fields for which they were trained?" he said almost none. Less than ten percent of plumbing majors go into plumbing. "So what is the point of this school?" I asked.

He answered, "To teach students to work with each other. To teach them to learn what it's like to achieve mastery in something. Then they go out in the real world and get a job where the jobs are." That is an interesting view on preparation:

Give someone a subspecialty so they can taste the feeling of mastery, which is truly addictive. The new Elementary School Center and all of us in pediatrics and education can collaborate on that mission. |*|*|c|

RUTH LOVE, PH.D.

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**Elementary Education: Its Significance
for the 20th and 21st Centuries**

"We must reclaim preschools as a part of the great elementary school tradition."

"Reform is not an event, it is a process."

"We must understand that education is costly and not apologize for it, and if you think education is costly, try ignorance."

"We must provide the best education for children no matter where they live or what kind of families they come from. Future Americans are in our classrooms. We don't know who will find the next cure for cancer or who will write a great symphony or who will design a plan to eliminate poverty and hunger in our society or who will discover a road to world peace, so we must educate ALL children to the best of our ability."

"You know, it would really help if the initiative to solve the teacher shortage came out of the White House. It would really help if the White House said, 'there is nothing more important than the education of our children.'"

"The real experts in education are in the classrooms."

"We now ask the elementary schools for what we used to pray to God."

GRADUATION POEM 1984 (excerpts)

When you enter school in kindergarten your hand is a chubby,
sweaty little thing, clutching onto your mother's or
father's firm one.

On your first day of first grade your hand is filled with a
pinch of confidence.

Entering second grade your hand only trembles a little.

In third grade your hand is shaped right with a small amount of
chubbiness left.

In fourth grade you know what is going on even more.

In fifth grade your hand may have either nail polish or scrapes.

In sixth grade your hand knows what it is doing.

As it should forever.

On graduation your hand is sweaty again. Clutching and grabbing
towards all of your goods friends.

Teacher's hands:

Shaking hands and welcoming you in.

Comforting you and helping you learn.

Wiping your eyes.

Helping you play, feel, and touch.

Hands help you with your everyday tasks.

Saying hello and goodbye.

Congratulating you when you are right.

Scolding you when you are wrong.

Our hands are trembling

as we read our speeches

Our hands are sweaty

when we do our dance

Our hands are cold

when we take our diplomas

Our hands are fidgety

as we wait to leave

Our hands are fast

when we open our presents

Our hands cover our eyes

as we cry of joy

Hands of leaving

HANDS

These are the hands of

GRADUATION!

—GROUP COLLABORATION

*We must recognize that the consequences of early education
and schooling are ultimate — even if not immediate.*

Allan Shedlin, Jr.
Remarks at lunch

ANGER AND HAPPINESS

Her eyes sting with anger
her hand makes a flat square
it comes slowly towards me
I can already feel a tingling
soon I hurt
I run into my room look into the mirror
my face is red
a scrunched up red face
of fury with a turned down mouth
a dream of a rainbow
covered with hot, hot lava

lying on a hammock, above a lake,
tied to two weeping willows;
the cool, warm, spring breeze
flowing through my hair,
I can hear the bunch of colorful
freshly picked flowers
falling in the spring lake

—GROUP COLLABORATION, 1984

*Childhood is an important stage of development in its own
right, not just a stage on the way to being "grown-up".*

Allan Shedlin, Jr.
Remarks at lunch

WORKSHOPS

Jeanne S. Chall, Ph.D.

Professor of Education
Director, Reading Laboratory
Harvard University
Graduate School of Education

Reading, Writing, and Thinking:
How They Develop & Interrelate

"It is most pleasant to read to children playfully and get them to pay attention to sounds and focus in on words."

Priscilla Vail, M.A.T.

Learning Specialist, author, teacher at Rippowam-Cisqua School,
Bedford, NY

Finding the Fingerprint: Helping Teachers & Administrators Identify
Learning Styles

"Learning disabilities can be created as well as inherited. Students who begin formal academics before they are developmentally ready — literally able — can appear 'dis-abled' and come to fit the label. Similarly, students who are given materials and methods which do not match their own learning styles can also appear disabled."

David N. Perkins, Ph.D.

Co-Director, Project Zero, Harvard University

Creativity — The Core of Learning

"Creativity is the core of all learning and knowledge."

"All knowledge is made up, and children can understand this and participate themselves in the making of knowledge."

Bickley Simpson, Ed.D.

Educational Psychologist, Milton, MA

Brain Development & Learning Styles
with implications for the computer in the classroom

"Young children shouldn't spend more than 20 minutes a day at a computer."

"Too much time spent on any computer language is genuinely unproductive because in the future computers will be so user friendly."

"Computer assisted instruction is not the most effective method for drill work. Peer to peer interaction is the best way to drill."

POETIC LICENSE

I can say things I don't want
people to hear
and disguise them in my poetry.
That is what makes writing mysterious.

I have the ability
to make up life and death
in a pencil and paper.
I can turn the nice dreams
into nightmares.

Because I am a writer
I get to have
more than one notebook.

I have the right
to take your face, your body,
and your personality
and put them on paper;
make people heroes or enemies,
happy or sad, crazy or sane.

I can change the emotions
of thousands
simply with a stroke
of my pen.

I have the right to examine you
to find the truth
but, because I am a writer,
I don't have to tell the truth.

I have the right to create, re-create,
write and rewrite.
I have the right to walk down the street
taking notes on everything I see;
it doesn't matter whether I like it or not.

I am a writer,
someone with a third eye
to see things
left unseen by others.
Someone with a third hand
to hold things
left unfound by others.

Writing means a dozen thoughts
bunched up in only a few words.
Everything held inside of me
slips out as easily as fish can swim.

I imagine something totally impossible—
my pen dances on the paper
making it real.

With a pen
I can get away with
anything!

—CLASS COLLABORATION, 1983

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The Elementary School Center (ESC) is an organization which brings together professionals and others involved in the development and education of the child in the elementary school (pre-school through eighth grade). It is like no other association in the country. It is an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt organization.

The objectives of ESC are:

- To improve the quality of schooling
- To serve as a national advocate for elementary schools
- To encourage, implement, and disseminate studies and research about elementary schools
- To increase public awareness of the importance of schools serving children from three to thirteen years old
- To provide a resource center for those involved with elementary schools
- To sharpen awareness of issues affecting elementary education
- To encourage communication and cooperative efforts among different groups working with children and youth of elementary school age
- To expand its activities through participation of its members
- To describe elementary school practices which can strengthen education at all levels

WHY AM **esc** ?

Recognizing that after the family, the elementary school provides the most significant institutional experience in a child's life, a group of elementary educators and other professionals established the ESC to serve the following needs:

1. the need for greater understanding by the public and the educational world of the power and complexity of the effects of elementary schooling in children's lives
2. the need to view schools as a continuum in which each element must be defined by reference to the others, rather than as a hierarchy in which the latest stage is the most significant.
3. the need to increase regard for elementary educators and other professionals working with the children.
4. the need to attract newcomers to elementary teaching at a time when the number of young children is increasing and teaching staffs are shrinking.

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